

DIFFERENT MINDS, STRONGER TEAMS

A TOOLKIT FOR PRACTISING
NEUROINCLUSION



While progress has been made in areas like gender and mental health, the conversation around neurodiversity remains underdeveloped. Many teams only broach the subject in the context of HR or compliance. Others feel intimidated by the medical lingo. When someone does disclose, medical terms like “ADHD” or “dyspraxia” often fail to resonate with peers and managers who don’t understand what they actually mean in day-to-day life.

This toolkit was designed to help you start the conversation, build empathy, and make inclusion actionable. Because every mind belongs in the room.



The goal isn't to fix people; it's to fix the environment so that different thinking styles become strengths not friction”

Stephanie Rix
Chief People Officer, HLB Global

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT



Whether you're a team leader, HR partner, or someone passionate about building a better workplace, you can use this resource to:

- ✓ **Start the conversation.** Use the frameworks and prompts inside to normalise discussion about work styles, needs, and strengths — no disclosure required.
- ✓ **Facilitate understanding.** Try the team tools (like the Working Styles Canvas or Cognitive Diversity Wheel) to help uncover how different minds think, process, and contribute.
- ✓ **Shift the culture.** Build psychological safety, reframe adjustments as performance enablers, and give feedback in ways that work for all kinds of brains.

WHEN TO USE IT

This guide is designed to support:



- › New team onboarding or alignment
- › Manager 1:1s and performance check-ins
- › Innovation workshops or retrospectives
- › Line manager and DEI training sessions

You don't need to follow every step in order. Pick what fits your team's context, and build from there.

UNDERSTAND DIFFERENT WORK STYLES

Every person — whether neurotypical or neurodivergent — has a preferred way of thinking, communicating, and getting work done. These preferences are called work styles. Some people like to talk things out loud. Others need time to process before responding. Some absorb information best through visuals or audio. Others prefer clear, written steps.

Work styles aren't quirks — they're cognitive preferences. And unless teams make them visible, they can easily lead to misalignment.

WHY WORK STYLES MATTER

Most teams don't talk about how they work. They just assume others operate the same way. But when expectations don't match, it can result in:

- ✗ Miscommunication
- ✗ Missed contributions
- ✗ Unintentional exclusion
- ✗ Team burnout

“At HLB we advocate human centred leadership, viewing people as unique individuals, as a shift from traditional top-down leadership styles,” says Stephanie Rix, HLB Chief People Officer. This isn't just a leadership issue — it affects peer collaboration too. Think: a dyslexic teammate being looped into long email chains they struggle to process, or a conceptual thinker being shut down in structured brainstorming.

By surfacing work style preferences, you create a culture where everyone feels empowered to contribute in the way that works best for them.

HOW TO EXPLORE WORK STYLES AS A TEAM

You don't need a formal assessment to get started. Begin by creating space for open conversations about how people prefer to work. Try one of these approaches:

Working styles canvas	Cognitive diversity wheel	Team role profiles
<p>A simple worksheet or shared doc where each team member outlines their preferences.</p> <p>Prompts can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › How I like to receive feedback › When I'm most productive › Preferred communication formats (email, video, chat, docs) › How I like to structure my workday › What stresses me out › How I like to make decisions › What to know about me if I'm quiet / overwhelmed › How I approach deadlines or time pressure › What not to do when I'm under pressure › How I process new information › What motivates me at work <p>✓</p> <p>Use for: Onboarding, team alignment sessions, manager 1:1s</p>	<p>Map the team's range of thinking styles (analytical, relational, structural, conceptual) in a visual format.</p> <p>Classifications can include:</p> <p>Analytical thinkers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › I'm at my best when I can analyse... › I tend to ask: "What's the evidence?" › I'm energised by... problem-solving with logic <p>Relational thinkers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › I'm at my best when I can support... relationships and team wellbeing › I tend to ask: "How will this affect people?" › I'm energised by... collaboration and consensus <p>Structural thinkers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › I'm at my best when there's... a clear plan and roles are defined › I tend to ask: "What's the process?" or "What's the next step?" › I prefer decisions based on... what's realistic and actionable <p>Conceptual thinkers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › I'm at my best when I can explore... future scenarios or new models › I tend to ask: "What if?" or "Why not?" › I prefer decisions based on... vision or potential <p>✓</p> <p>Use for: Project planning, balancing teams, avoiding groupthink</p>	<p>Helps teams understand natural roles people gravitate toward in group work.</p> <p>Belbin team roles classification:</p> <p>Action-oriented roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Shaper – drives and challenges the team to improve. › Implementer – turns ideas into practical action. › Completer-Finisher – Polishes and perfects work with attention to detail. <p>People-oriented roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Coordinator – clarifies goals and delegates effectively. › Teamworker – builds consensus and supports others. › Resource Investigator – explores opportunities and builds external connections. <p>Thought-oriented roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Plant – generates original ideas and solves complex problems. › Monitor-Evaluator-provides logical judgment and weighs options objectively. › Specialist – provides in-depth knowledge in a specific field. <p>✓</p> <p>Use for: Structuring teams, improving collaboration, and team coherence.</p>

MAKE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY A TEAM NORM



Innovation isn't something you can demand on a deadline. It takes time, space, and the confidence that your ideas won't be dismissed or penalised. As Mike Hatrick, Vice President IP Strategy & Portfolio at Volvo Group put it, "If somebody comes to me and says, 'I need you to solve this problem,' they describe it to me and then say, 'So, what's your answer?' — well, I'm not going to give them an innovative answer. The answer is going to be something that I pulled from my existing knowledge and experience."

Without the right conditions, we fall back on safe, familiar thinking, not the kind of risk-taking innovation organisations are striving for. So, promoting greater creativity and innovation starts with building 'safe spaces'.

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

To leverage your people's 'superpowers', you need to be giving them some freedom to explore, try, fail, learn, and succeed without being afraid to

do so. Psychological safety means people feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, admitting mistakes, and offering dissent without being embarrassed or punished for it.



Genuinely allowing a person to be a person, and to create a safe space where somebody can have a meltdown or have a really bad day and know they're not going to be judged or treated differently is the biggest thing you could do for anybody who's neurodivergent."

Tania Martin, Founder and Neurodiversity Consultant at PegSquared.

HOW TO CREATE HIGH PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AMONG TEAMS

You don't create psychological safety through a one-time workshop. You embed it through consistent team behaviours. Try these small but powerful rituals:

Open with ideas, not answers	Separate the critique from the person	Celebrate learning from failure
<p>Start meetings by asking:</p> <p>“</p> <p>What's one perspective we haven't considered yet?”</p> <p>“What's the boldest, moonshot idea we could try?”</p> <p>✓</p> <p>This signals that dissent and imagination are welcome.</p>	<p>Set team norms like:</p> <p>“</p> <p>We challenge the idea, not the person.”</p> <p>“It's okay to say: I need a moment to digest this before answering.”</p> <p>✓</p> <p>This helps keep discussions constructive and respectful.</p>	<p>Highlight smart risks and lessons learned:</p> <p>“</p> <p>Here's something that didn't go to plan and what we took away from it.”</p> <p>“Whose experiment helped us think differently this week?”</p> <p>✓</p> <p>This encourages people to continue with their experiments.</p>



USE ADJUSTMENTS AS A STRENGTH STRATEGY

Workplace adjustments are often misunderstood as special accommodations — a last resort or a favour. In reality, they're performance enablers. Small, thoughtful changes to how we communicate, plan, or collaborate can unlock huge value, not just for neurodivergent employees but for entire teams.

When approached proactively and without stigma, adjustments become a normal part of working well together.

SHIFT THE MINDSET: FROM "EXTRA" TO EFFECTIVE

Instead of asking "What do you need because of your diagnosis?", ask: "What helps you do your best work?" or "What makes it harder to stay focused or feel heard?"

That reframes adjustments as part of a strengths-based, inclusive approach to performance, not something people have to earn or justify.

As Tania Martin shares, one employee with dyslexia didn't need expensive tech — just a manager who sat down each morning and said, "Let's go through five priority emails together." A simple shift, but it built trust, reduced overwhelm, and helped the employee thrive.

Simple adjustments that enable performance

COMMUNICATION

- ✓ Send agendas ahead of meetings
- ✓ Summarise key actions verbally and in writing
- ✓ Use plain, concise language in emails
- ✓ Offer alternatives to long email threads (e.g., voice notes, calls)

WORK PREFERENCES

- ✓ Allow flexible start times or deep work hours
- ✓ Enable task prioritisation check-ins with the manager
- ✓ Provide visual vs. text-based instructions
- ✓ Use AI tools to help with knowledge management

ENVIRONMENT

- ✓ Offer noise-cancelling headphones or quiet workspace options
- ✓ Let employees choose consistent desks (vs. hotdesking)
- ✓ Adjust lighting or seating if needed
- ✓ Normalise camera-off options during virtual meetings

TEAM PRACTICES

- ✓ Create a shared “working preferences” doc for the team
- ✓ Assign meeting summaries to someone who enjoys doing them
- ✓ Give more time for processing and follow-up after discussions
- ✓ Encourage decompression breaks without judgment



LEARN TO GIVE INCLUSIVE FEEDBACK



Feedback is one of the most powerful tools you have to support performance, growth, and connection. But when it's too vague, overly critical, or delivered without care, it can do more harm than good, especially for neurodivergent team members, who may interpret language differently or need more clarity to act on input.

Inclusive feedback is clear, specific, collaborative, and designed to help people succeed, not just correct mistakes.

✓ CLEAR

✓ SPECIFIC

✓ COLLABORATIVE



WHAT INCLUSIVE FEEDBACK LOOKS LIKE

Inclusive feedback is specific, constructive, and delivered in a way that supports understanding, confidence, and growth across all communication and cognitive styles. It avoids ambiguity, considers the individual's processing needs, and builds trust rather than fear.

Traditional feedback often assumes the receiver will "read between the lines" or intuit the intended meaning. Inclusive feedback removes the guesswork. "One of the worst things we can do as creative leaders is just tell people, 'That's great, keep going,'" says Mike Hatrick. "Instead, we should be asking: 'What's your next barrier? Who can help you? How can I connect with you better?'"

Traditional feedback

“You did well, thanks”
“This doesn’t quite work for me”

Inclusive feedback

“Here’s what worked well — and why it landed.”
“Here’s what I’d suggest trying differently — and how I can help.”

How to give more effective feedback



Be specific and actionable

Generic praise or criticism is hard to interpret. Instead, describe the impact:

“The proposal was strong, but I think we lost clarity in the middle. Want to walk through how we could simplify it?”



Mind your tone and timing

Avoid giving feedback in a high-stress moment unless it’s urgent. It may likely misfire.

Offer choices on timing when possible:
“Would you prefer a quick chat now or time to reflect first?”



Ask guiding questions

Don’t shoot off the ideas at the root. Instead, encourage people to further refine it:

- Is there a low-risk way we could test this?
- How might we simplify or adapt this?



Make it a two-way street

Feedback should feel like a conversation, not a critique session.

Build rapport by asking: “Is there anything I could be doing differently to support you better?”

MODEL VULNERABILITY TO UNLOCK TRUST



Trust isn't just built through performance — it's built through openness. When leaders share their own working preferences, uncertainties, or challenges, it signals to others that it's safe to do the same. By having more candid conversations, you're showing your team that being human is part of the job.

HOW VULNERABILITY BUILDS INCLUSION

Neurodivergent employees often mask struggles to “blend in.” But when leaders normalise difference (including their own), they help shift the culture from perfectionism to psychological safety.

“There's a real strength in leaders being aware of their team's strengths and challenges — but also normalising their own,” says Tania Martin. Model the type of openness you want others to feel safe practising.

“I prefer to process big decisions in writing first — can I come back to this tomorrow?” might seem like a small admission, but it opens the door for others to say what they need, too. The same goes for saying “I missed something there, thanks for pointing it out,” or “I find this part of the project challenging, so I'd love your input.”

HOW TO LEAD WITH OPENNESS AND EMPATHY

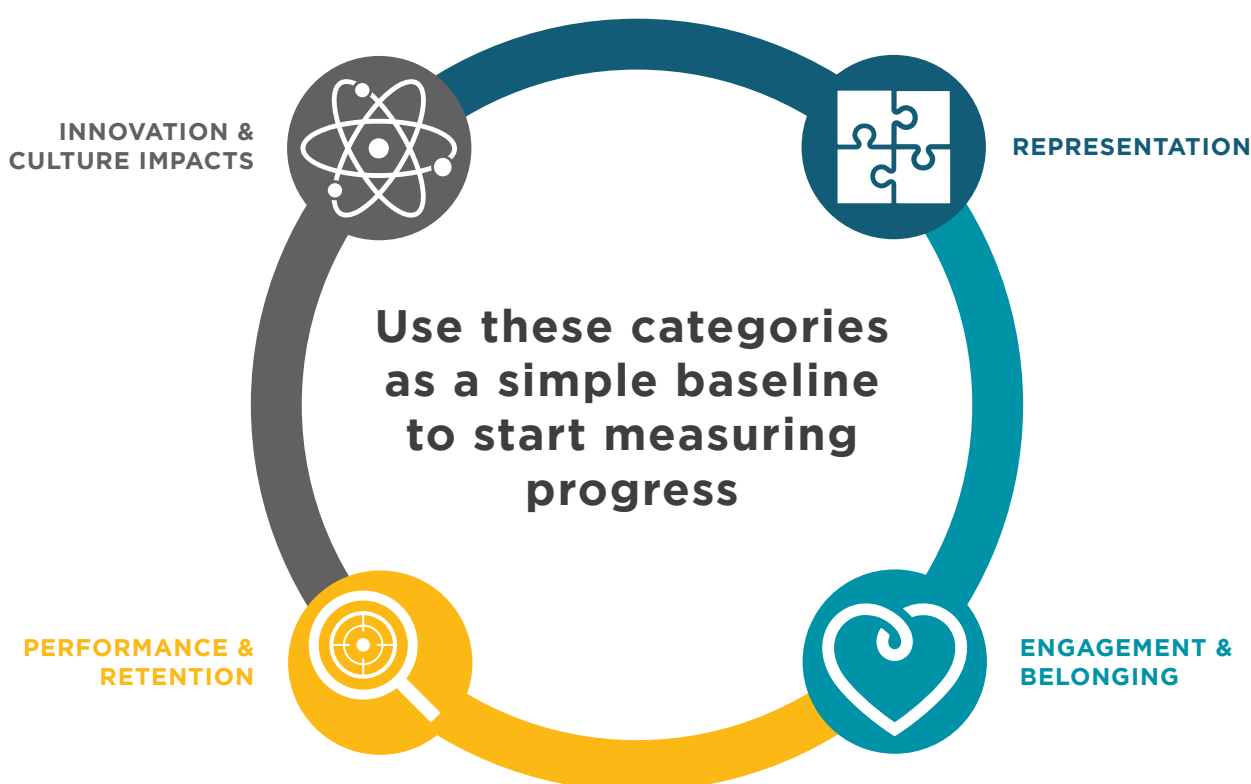
Explain your “why” out loud	Share learning moments, not just wins	Acknowledge when things feel uncertain
<p>When making a decision or asking for a change, share your reasoning, especially if it might not be obvious to others:</p> <p>“</p> <p>I paused the project not because of the work quality, but because I think the goals shifted.”</p> <p>✓</p> <p>This builds clarity and shows thoughtfulness, not secrecy.</p>	<p>Openly talk about the lessons from past mistakes and failures:</p> <p>“</p> <p>When I rushed a similar project last quarter, we missed key input. That’s why I want to slow down here.”</p> <p>✓</p> <p>This normalises learning through trial and experimentation, which are part of innovation.</p>	<p>Being honest about ambiguity helps teams stay grounded and reduces pressure to fake confidence.</p> <p>“</p> <p>There are still some unknowns here — and that’s okay. Let’s stay flexible and adapt as we go.”</p> <p>✓</p> <p>This reassures people that uncertainty doesn’t equal failure.</p>



TRACKING CULTURAL CHANGE

Culture doesn't shift just because you ran a workshop or adjusted your meeting style. Real inclusion shows up over time — in how people feel, how they collaborate, and whether they stay and grow. To understand if your neuroinclusion efforts are working, you need to track both what you do and how it's experienced.

This isn't about complex dashboards. It's about paying attention and creating feedback loops that help you learn and adapt.



REPRESENTATION

- ✓ % of employees who self-identify as neurodivergent (voluntarily)
- ✓ Diversity of cognitive profiles in hiring panels and project teams
- ✓ Applications from neurodiverse talent sources

ENGAGEMENT & BELONGING

- ✓ Pulse survey scores on psychological safety, openness, and trust
- ✓ Participation in ERGs, trainings, or neurodiversity-focused events
- ✓ Uptake of team tools like working styles canvases or role profiles

PERFORMANCE & RETENTION

- ✓ Career progression of neurodivergent employees vs. the overall average
- ✓ Use of adjustments in performance review or goal-setting conversations
- ✓ Retention rates and exit themes

INNOVATION & CULTURE IMPACTS

- ✓ Volume and diversity of idea submissions in team or org-wide initiatives
- ✓ Participation in cross-functional innovation challenges
- ✓ Feedback on collaboration (esp. in mixed neurotype teams)



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